

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 INR-07 L-02 ACDA-05

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P R 211613Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5287

SECDEF WASHDC

OSAF/INL

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AFB

AFSC ANDREWS AFB

ASD WPAFB OH/CC/OI/YP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 THE HAGUE 0905

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NL

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT: VREDELING'S DILEMMA

REF: THE HAGUE 0754

1. SUMMARY: IN FEBRUARY 20 LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH DCM, ALBERT SLIGTING, HEAD OF THE DEFENSE MINISTRY'S INFORMATION SERVICE AND A POLITICAL CONFIDANT OF PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL, EMPHASIZED THAT HIS MINISTRY'S OVERRIDING CONCERN IS TO HANDLE THE REPLACEMENT OF F-104'S SO AS TO GIVE BOOST TO THE LONG-TERM PROCESS OF BUILDING EUROPEAN UNITY, OR AT LEAST TO AVOID DOING HARM TO THAT PROCESS. SLIGTING STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT NEITHER MINISTER VREDELING NOR ANY OTHER SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL HAS ANY INTEREST IN BUYING THE MIRAGE FOR TO DO
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SO AT THIS TIME, THEY BELIEVE, WOULD SPLIT EUROPE BY MAKING

FRANCE MORE INDEPENDENCE-MINDED AND EVEN LESS COOPERATIVE. INSTEAD VREDELING AND COMPANY ARE LOOKING DESPERATELY FOR A WAY IN WHICH THEY CAN BUY AN AMERICAN PLANE WHILE ADVANCING THEIR FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVE OF EUROPEAN UNITY. SLIGTING SAID THAT IN THE FACE OF THIS DILEMMA THERE IS A REAL CHANCE THAT THE GON WOULD TAKE NO DECISION AT ALL. SLIGTING THOUGHT THAT VREDELING WOULD BE INTERESTED, IF INVITED, IN MEETING WITH SECRETARY SCHLESINGER IN WASHINGTON AT A LATER DATE, WHEN THE AGONIZING REPLACEMENT QUESTION WAS MORE RIPE FOR DEFINITIVE DISCUSSION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN AN EXTRAORDINARILY FRANK CONVERSATION IN WHICH SLIGTING (A FORMER EMBASSY THE HAGUE EMPLOYEE UNTIL HE WENT TO WORK FOR THE SOCIALIST-ORIENTED DAILY HET PAROOL, 1959-1969) APPEALED FOR US UNDERSTANDING AND PATIENCE. HE EMPHASIZED THAT VREDLING PERSONALLY AND HIS SENIOR PEOPLE WERE AGONIZING OVER WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE REPLACEMENT FIGHTER QUESTION. SLIGTING BEGAN BY REITERATING WHAT WE HAVE HEARD FROM EVERY RESPONSIBLE DUTCH OFFICIAL, THAT THERE IS NO QUESTION AS TO THE DECISIVE MILITARY SUPERIORITY OF THE F-16. SLIGTING ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE WOULD NEED A HIGH PERFORMANCE LIMITED AIR SUPERIORITY PLANE SUCH AS THE F-16 TO FULFILL ITS NATO ASSIGNED DUTIES IN THE 1980S. HOWEVER, VREDELING WAS NOT APPROACHING THIS QUESTION FROM ONLY OR EVEN PRIMARILY A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW. RATHER HE WAS TAKING LONGER TERM VIEW AND SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION THAT WOULD GIVE A BOOST TO THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN UNITY, OR AT LEAST WOULD NOT DO IRREPARABLE HARM TO THAT PROCESS.

3. SLIGTING STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT VREDELING WAS NOT RPT NOT INTERESTED IN BUYING THE MIRAGE, FOR HE BELIEVED THAT TO DO SO AT THIS TIME WOULD SIMPLY REVITALIZE THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND THUS MAKE FRANCE A MORE DIVISIVE FACTOR IN THE EUROPEAN FAMILY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PROBLEM OF BUYING THE F-16 WAS THAT IN VREDELING'S VIEW IT WOULD FORCLOSE WHATEVER CHANCE THERE MIGHT BE TO DEVELOP A TRUE EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IN THE 1980S. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH AN INDUSTRY WAS ESSENTIAL TO THE REALIZATION OF VREDELING'S FUNDAMENTAL

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OBJECTIVE OF BUILDING EUROPEAN UNITY. PUTTING IT IN GOOD DUTCH CALVINIST TERMS (IN THE NETHERLANDS THERE IS OFTEN NO CALVINIST LIKE A SOCIALIST), SLIGTING ENTREATED THE UNITED STATES NOT TO "FORCE" THE NETHERLANDS TO TAKE A DECISION (FOR THE F-16) WHICH THE NETHERLANDS WOULD "REPENT OF" LATER.

4. SLIGTING AGREED THAT IN LOGIC THE PIETER DANKERT

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF BUYING THE NORTHROP F-5E (THE HAGUE 0754) MADE LITTLE SENSE FOR DESPITE ITS PROVEN GROUND SUPPORT CAPABILITY, THE F-5E COULD NOT DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST THE PRESENT GENERATION OF SOVIET FIGHTERS, LET ALONE WHAT SOVIETS MIGHT HAVE IN THE AIR IN THE 1980S. BUT HERE SLIGTING AGAIN EMPHASIZED THAT MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS WERE NOT RPT NOT OVERRIDING. THE APPEAL OF THE F-5E WAS THE SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS IT WOULD REPRESENT COMPARED WITH THE PURCHASE OF THE SAME NUMBER OF F16S. THESE SAVINGS COULD LATER BE APPLIED TO HELP GENERATE A TRUE EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY. SLIGTING MADE CLEAR THAT THIS WAS ONLY A CONCEPT AND THAT THE DUTCH AT LEAST HAD NOT DEVELOPED ANY PLANS TO IMPLEMENT IT.

5. SLIGTING HASTENED TO ADD THAT NO ONE IN THE MINISTRY WAS SOLD ON THE F-5E IN LIEU OF THE F-16. WHAT VREDELING AND COMPANY WERE DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR WAS "BRAIN WAVE" TO ENABLE THEM TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR TWIN OBJECTIVES OF PRESERVING THE FUTURE OF A EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND ASSURING THAT THERE WOULD BE SOME KIND OF REPLACEMENT FOR THE F-104S BY THE 1980S. SLIGTING WONDERED, FOR INSTANCE, IF IT COULD BE ARRANGED FOR THE US TO "TAKE BACK" THE F-16S HALF WAY THROUGH THEIR LIFE CYCLE SO THAT THEY COULD BE REPLACED BY A NEW EUROPEAN-MADE FIGHTER. HE SAID THAT HIS MINISTRY WOULD BE MOST RECEPTIVE TO ANY IDEAS THE US MIGHT HAVE ON THIS SCORE. HE FEARED THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCH IDEAS THE US POSITION IN SUPPORT OF THE F-16 MIGHT CAUSE THE GON TO POSTPONE THE REPLACEMENT DECISION INDEFINITELY.

6. SIGNIFICANTLY, SLIGTING MADE NO REFERENCE TO THE ECONOMIC OFFSET COMPONENT OF THE F-16 PROPOSAL. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE DISINTEREST IN OFFSET REFLECTED
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BY SENIOR MOD OFFICIALS FROM THE BEGINNING OF OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, SLIGTING SAID THAT THE PRICE FACTOR WAS IMPORTANT TO THE MOD; THEREFORE, IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THE US GIVE WELL FOUNDED AND PERSUASIVE ANSWERS TO THE NEW SET OF QUESTIONS WHICH THE CONSORTIUM COUNTRIES HAVE JUST FORWARDED.

7. SLIGTING PROFESSED NOT TO BE IMPRESSED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S SUPPORT OF THE F-16. HE DISPARAGED FONMIN VAN DER STOEL AS A MINISTER WITHOUT ANY POLITICAL BASE IN HIS OWN PARTY. MOREOVER, ACCORDING TO SLIGTING, VAN DER STOEL WAS INDIFFERENT TO THE FEELINGS OF THE ORDINARY MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY ON THE REPLACEMENT FIGHTER ISSUE. SLIGTING IMPLIED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S INFLUENCE IN THE FINAL DECISION WOULD NOT

BE DETERMINING.

8. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, SLIGTING THOUGHT THAT VREDELING WOULD BE INTERESTED, IF INVITED, IN VISITING SECRETARY SCHLESINGER IN WASHINGTON WHEN THE REPLACEMENT QUESTION WAS MORE RIPE FOR DEFINITIVE DISCUSSION. SUMMARIZING, SLIGTING SAID THERE HE WAS SURE THAT THERE WOULD BE NO MAJORITY TODAY IN THE CABINET FOR THE PURCHASE OF THE MIRAGE; LIKEWISE THERE WOULD BE NO MAJORITY FOR THE F-16. THAT WAS THE DILEMMA, AND AT THE MOMENT VREDELING AND COMPANY SIMPLY SAW NO WAY OUT.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 INR-07 L-02 ACDA-05

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SECDEF WASHDC
OSAF/INL
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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
USMISSION NATO
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AFB
AFSC ANDREWS AFB
ASD WPAFB OH/CC/OI/Y

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 THE HAGUE 0905

9. COMMENT: WE MADE SOME IMPRESSION ON SLIGTING BY COMING BACK TO THE POINT SEVERAL TIMES THAT THE FIGHTING CAPABILITIES OF THE REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT WERE NOT SOMETHING THAT COULD OR SHOULD BE RELEGATED TO SECOND PLACE. WE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE DEFENSE PEOPLE MAY HAVE

GOTTEN THEMSELVES INTO THIS SELF-INFLICTED DILEMMA BY TRYING TO MIX INCOMPATIBLE MILITARY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES. BY ANALOGY WE SUGGESTED THAT THE BUSINESS OF A FIRE ENGINE WAS TO FIGHT FIRES AND NOT BECOME SIMPLY THE INSTRUMENT TO ADVANCE A QUITE DIFFERENT OBJECTIVE. WITH THIS SAID, WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THAT SLIGTING HAS IDENTIFIED A VERY REAL PROBLEM FOR HIS BOSS, WHICH MAY INDEED BE SUSCEPTIBLE ONLY TO SOME INGENUOUS NON-MILITARY TREATMENT. FURTHERMORE, DESPITE THE APPARENT SINCERITY OF SLIGTING'S COMMENTS WE THINK IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO ASSUME THAT WE ARE OUT OF THE WOODS AS
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FAR AS THE RISK OF A MIRAGE BUY.

10. SLIGTING'S COMMENT RE A POSSIBLE VISIT BY VREDELING TO WASHINGTON WAS IN RESPONSE TO A HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION AND SHOULD THEREFORE NOT RPT NOT BE GIVEN UNDUE IMPORTANCE. SLIGTING DID NOT APPEAR TO HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY BEFORE AND GAVE NO INDICATION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH VREDELING MIGHT WISH TO VISIT WASHINGTON OR WHEN. SINCE THE CREATION OF A EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IS BEING USED WITH INCREASING FERVOR IF NOT LOGIC AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT BUYING THE F-16, WE INTEND IN CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR CONTACTS TO GET THEM TO DEFINE WHAT THEY MEAN BY A EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND HOW THEY WOULD PROPOSE TO DEVELOP ONE BETTER WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF THE F-16 TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC OFFSET.
END COMMENT.
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